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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2009

In Today's Papers

Party Meetings Focus on Gaza and Israel

Media outlets report that Prime Minister Erdogan lashed out at David Ignatius, the moderator of the Davos panel in which Erdogan and Israeli President Peres sparred, during yesterday's AKP group meeting in the parliament. Erdogan called Ignatius "rude" and criticized Ignatius because he "dared to put his hand on the shoulder of a prime minister." On charges that his attitude in Davos was "not diplomatic," Erdogan said he was "a politician, not a diplomat." "I could have reacted differently were I not sticking to the code of diplomatic conduct," Erdogan said. Mainstream Aksam writes, "The prime minister implied he could have gone so far as to punch Ignatius." Finally, Erdogan stressed that "from now on, Turkey will act as a country aware of its standing."

Addressing his CHP lawmakers in parliament, opposition leader Deniz Baykal criticized Erdogan for using the Davos incident as an "internal political tool." "We continue military cooperation projects with Israel and are engaged in an intense cooperation with them. Israeli pilots who bombed the children in Gaza are trained in Konya," emphasized Baykal. He added, "We not only feel sorry for the children killed in Gaza, but for the one million Muslims killed in Iraq as well."

Opposition far right MHP leader Devlet Bahceli slammed Erdogan, saying the PM stood behind the victims in Gaza, because he was "out on a hunt for votes before the forthcoming municipal elections in March." The pro-Kurdish DTP chairman Ahmet Turk said Erdogan was "not convincing" when he reacted to the atrocities in Gaza. "If Turkey wants to lead the peace efforts in the Middle East, the PM must understand that the road to peace in the region passes through Diyarbakir," implying that Erdogan should take a more active role in addressing Turkey's Kurdish issue instead of Gaza.

Editorial Commentary on Gaza-Israel

Yasemin Congar wrote in leftist Taraf: "Despite some criticism, Prime Minister Erdogan's sincerity deserves respect and has the potential to end an undeniable cruelty such as that in Gaza case."

However, it is ironic that the prime minister of a bloody-handed state speaks out for Gazan children, particularly when our own children have been killing our own children in a 100-year long civil war. If Erdogan continues to act under humanly and democratic considerations even more, he can be hailed as a genuine leader for morale both in the world and in this region."

Ertugrul Ozkok wrote in mainstream Hurriyet: "If Turkey is capable of telling Israel they are wrong, we should be able to make the same effort and admit we are wrong to support Hamas. It is also very important to see the broader picture in international suffering. Turkey is limiting itself to Gaza when it comes to compassion for people who are suffering. If we are sincere enough, this approach should be extended to the others, to Sudan for instance."

Ismail Kucukkaya wrote in mainstream Aksam: "Turkey's efforts in the Middle East and in the Islamic world are good things. However, we should not lose the West while gaining the East. If we do not keep our relationship with the West properly intact, Turkey will lose its power as a bridge that links the East to the West."

Hasan Bulent Kahraman wrote in mainstream Sabah: "At the end of the day, Turkey will face serious consequences if Hamas does not transform itself into a political organization that abandons violence."

Praise in the Arab Press, Criticism in the Western Press for Erdogan

Mainstreams Hurriyet and Vatan report a commentary in the leading Lebanese daily Dar-al-Hayat "praises Erdogan for denouncing Israeli

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violence." The article issues a call for the "revival of the Ottoman Empire as a tool for the unification of the Muslim world," and adds Erdogan should be declared "caliph" and "sultan of the empire." In the West, Erdogan is criticized for "throwing a metaphorical shoe at Shimon Peres in Davos." An article in The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) denounces Erdogan's arrogance. "Erdogan forgets that Israel and the U.S. are Turkey's only friends in the Middle East," the WSJ says. WSJ says "Erdogan tarnished the well-earned Turkish reputation for hospitality and tolerance by calling the Israeli President 'old' and 'a liar.'"

A Message of Brotherhood to Turkey's Jewish Community from Gul
Mainstream Sabah and liberal Radikal report that Turkish leaders told the Jewish community that they are safe in Turkey. Prior to his departure to Saudi Arabia, President Gul told reporters at the airport, "All people living on this land have equal rights. There cannot be discrimination against any citizen. The issues related to Israel and the issues concerning Jews in Turkey are completely separate. No one should assume a wrong attitude on this issue. We should warn those with a wrong attitude." At his party group meeting, PM Erdogan said "we guarantee the safety of the Jewish community."

Ambassador Jeffrey Visits PM Erdogan, Emphasizes Cooperation
Media report on Ambassador Jeffrey's first visit to the Prime Minister in a positive and straightforward manner. NTV notes Ambassador Jeffrey emphasized "the close alliance between the two countries." Mainstream Star reports in "Turkey and the U.S. - A Strong Alliance," that "U.S. Ambassador James Jeffrey met with Prime Minister Erdogan to discuss Middle East peace, energy security, Iran, and Iraq." Islamist-oriented Zaman quotes Ambassador Jeffrey in the headline, "We Will Continue to Work in Partnership with Turkey."

Badminton Diplomacy between the U.S. and Iran
Mainstreams Sabah and Milliyet report that the U.S. State Department announced the American Female Badminton Team has accepted Tehran's invitation to participate in an International 'Fecr' Female Badminton Tournament. Sabah notes, "Observers stressed that it is 'very meaningful' that Iran invited the American female team and the American team accepted the invite." Milliyet notes that the 'Fecr' Tournament will take place in Tehran February 5-8 and 16 countries' teams will participate. The U.S. in turn invited the Iranian team

to the U.S. for a competition in June.

TV News (CNN Turk)

Domestic

- The file on the Germany-based Islamist Deniz Feneri charity scandal is reportedly given to Frankfurt prosecutor's office. The prosecutor will send the file to Justice Ministry in Berlin before it's sent to Turkey.
- The head of Turkey's leading labor union Turk-Is says 400,000 to 500,000 workers lost their jobs during the latest crisis.
- The new chief of Dicle University hospital in Diyarbakir said the former hospital management procured drugs to meet the hospital's needs for a hundred years. Half of the drugs were past expiry date, and the loss totals 8 million lira.
- Police have found 27 kg of TNT bars and 100 gram of C-4 explosives in Beykoz neighborhood in Istanbul.

World

- Somalia pirates release a Turkish cargo vessel, MV Bosphorus Prodigy, which was hijacked in December. The ship and its crew of

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eight Ukrainians and three Turks were freed on Monday.

- Iran's Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani invites his Turkish counterpart Koksal Toptan to join a conference in Tehran regarding Gaza.
- The U.S. army releases about 70 Iraqi prisoners as part of a security accord signed in November which calls for the withdrawal of U.S. troops by the end of 2011.
- Alexandros Petersen of the Atlantic Council says the Nabucco Conference held last week in Budapest was "important," adding many European leaders were disappointed by the absence of Turkish PM Erdogan.

JEFFREY